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NEW YORK - SHORTLY AFTER MIDNIGHT, GEORGE P. BAXTRUM, CARRYING WALKIE-TALKIES, A CAMERA, FLASHLIGHTS, A DEVICE BROKE INTO A GREENWICH VILLAGE BUILDING.

THE YEAR WAS 1958. BAXTRUM AND COMPANY WERE FBI AGENTS. THE BUILDING WAS THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY.

THE FBI SAID IT WAS LOOKING FOR DOCUMENTS "WHICH MIGHT TEND TO ESTABLISH" THAT THE SWP WAS "WORKING FOR THE OVERTHROW OF THE GOVERNMENT."

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BETWEEN 1959 AND 1966, BAXTRUM REPEATED THIS SCENE 94 TIMES. HE LATER ADMITTED HE FOUND NO EVIDENCE OF ESPIONAGE, VIOLENCE OR CRIMINAL WRONGDOING.

THIS PAST THURSDAY, AFTER EIGHT YEARS OF PRETRIAL MANUEVERS, THE FBI WENT TO COURT ACCUSED OF USING SURREPTITIOUS ENTRIES, ILLEGAL WIRETAPS, CONFIDENTIAL INFORMANTS AND OTHER "DIRTY TRICKS" TO DISRUPT AND DISCREDIT THE SWP.

THE EVIDENCE IS THOUSANDS OF PAGES OF FBI DOCUMENTS ABOUT ITS OPERATION COINTELPRO, BUREAU SLANG FOR "COUNTERINTELLIGENCE OPERATION."

THE SWP OBTAINED THE DOCUMENTS TO PREPARE ITS CASE THROUGH COURT ACTIONS AND THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT. THOSE DOCUMENTS DETAIL A PART OF COINTELPRO THE FBI CALLED "SWP DISRUPTION PROGRAM."

ALSO NAMED BY THE SWP IN THE SUIT AS DEFENDANTS ARE THE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY, THE IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE AND NUMEROUS GOVERNMENT AGENCIES. INDIVIDUAL DEFENDANTS, INCLUDING FORMER PRESIDENT NIXON, HIS COUNSEL JOHN DEAN, HIS CHIEF OF STAFF BOB HALDEMAN AND HIS ATTORNEY GENERAL JOHN MITCHELL, WERE DROPPED FROM THE SUIT FRIDAY.

THE HISTORIC TRIAL COMES AT A TIME WHEN INTELLIGENCE OFFICIALS ARE ASKING THE REAGAN ADMINISTRATION FOR INCREASED AUTHORITY TO GATHER INFORMATION ON AMERICANS IN THIS COUNTRY.

SOME OF THE TECHNIQUES THEY WANT TO USE, ACCORDING TO A DRAFT OF A PROPOSED EXECUTIVE ORDER, ARE THOSE THAT THE FBI IS BEING SUED OVER - INFILTRATION, PHYSICAL SURVEILLANCE AND SEARCHES.

"THAT (PROPOSED EXECUTIVE ORDER) IS FRIGHTENING BECAUSE ... IT WOULD AUTHORIZE THE COINTELPRO-LIKE OPERATIONS," SAID ALLAN ADLER, COUNSEL FOR THE CENTER FOR NATIONAL SECURITIES STUDIES.

ADLER POINTED TO EFFORTS TO REVIVE "UN-AMERICAN ACTIVITIES" GROUPS SUCH AS THOSE TO RE-ESTABLISH THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON INTERNAL SECURITY.

THE FBI MAY COME UNDER POLITICAL PRESSURE, HE SAID, TO REVIVE INVESTIGATIONS OF POLITICAL GROUPS LAWFULLY EXERCISING THEIR RIGHT TO

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